



# A Piece of my Mind

Editorial Comment

## Our new normal?

I cannot imagine going back to the olden days pre-COVID-19. And I suspect that we won't ever go there in many ways.

Let's hope that our social lives will return to normal. It isn't natural to live in a cocoon. For people living on their own, it must have been a dreadful time – very few of us are cut out to be hermits. For those pharmacists who have worked throughout lockdown, it must have been difficult to wind down and relax because many "normal" leisure time activities involve other people.

People who have been fortunate enough to work from home have now adapted to the new normal. They've been just as productive, if not more so. No fighting with traffic, very few interruptions (unless they have young children!), no distractions by other staff members. I have no doubt that many people work more at home than they do at work – their working time is flexible and it's easy to get so involved that you just carry on, rather than stopping because the clock tells you that it's time to go home. During this time of forgetting which day of the week it is, we've sometimes forgotten to take a break over weekends too. And there's a very real risk of feeling isolated from other people.

Even meetings have changed. For the first time in its history, the AGM of the PSSA was a virtual meeting. And it worked. Every virtual meeting I've attended this year has worked well. It must have saved the organisers a lot of money too – no air fares, no accommodation or meal costs.

Have people felt frustrated because they couldn't have their say? They shouldn't have, because all they needed to do was to raise a virtual hand! Of course, part of the value of face to face meetings is that sometimes a person's face tells more of what they're thinking than their words do. And it definitely helps to develop working relationships with participants.

Is working remotely and having virtual meetings going to be part of our new normal? It makes sense in so many ways to incorporate an element of working remotely into part of the work week. And many of the meetings we need can be easily arranged as virtual meetings – far better than the old telecons we used to have. Of course, a major difficulty has been the unpredictability of our loadshedding!

## Pharmacy in action

We're familiar with that phrase. Every PSSA newsletter has these words in the heading. But do we see the action? So much of it takes place

behind the scenes. Sometimes there are tangible benefits, such as the journal you have in your hands, the books you order, the indemnity insurance you buy, the CPD events that you attend. For the most part, however, the interactions with stakeholders and the monitoring of legislation and much of the PSSA offices' work is quietly behind the scenes.

And then – can you hear the trumpets? The arrival of the webinar. The PSSA has hosted a number of webinars and they have now become a real occasion. Recent webinars on pharmacy legislation have attracted more than 200 participants, all members of the PSSA from around the country. And suddenly, we actually feel like a family of pharmacists. This is really pharmacy in action.

CPD becomes easier and more accessible. The fact that you can view the webinar at a time convenient for you means that we don't have to be in the same room at the same time. You don't need to go out at night to a CPD event. If you live in a small town or a remote area, you're also included.

Again, face to face meetings are valuable and give us a chance to interact with each other individually, but virtual CPD meetings solve many of the accessibility problems that we have always had. Now you mostly need data and either battery power or electricity.

Thank you, Mariet Eksteen, for taking the initiative to organise the webinars. I know the amount of work that goes into it, but I really believe that this is a valuable platform for the benefit of PSSA members.

## Recognising women pharmacists

Another person who used his initiative this month is Shawn Zeelie, the president of SAAHIP. He used Women's Month as an opportunity to pay tribute to influential women pharmacists.

Shawn mentions Sue Putter in his column this month. Younger pharmacists may not realise what a triumph it was when she became the first female president of SAAHIP and soon thereafter the first woman to be elected to the Pharmacy Board, as it was then. At that stage, and in all the decades before, pharmacy was decidedly male dominated. The first time I applied for a job at the PSSA in the mid-1980s, I was asked to go to the office. I thought it was for an interview, but when I arrived, the interviewer sat me down and very sweetly said to me, "The job involves going to meetings at night. I wouldn't want my daughter to do that, so I don't want you to either." And I was so subservient in those days that I didn't even argue.

**Lorraine Osman**